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WILDLIFE SERVICES—WEST VIRGINIA

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in West Virginia

Every day, residents, industries, organizations and agencies call on West Virginia Wildlife Services (WS) for help in protecting agriculture, human health and safety, natural resources, and property from damage or threats posed by wildlife. WS' professional wildlife biologists respond to these requests with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

West Virginia is a diverse mix of urban and suburban settings, agricultural lands, and extensive forested environments with the Appalachian Mountains dominating the eastern portion of the State. This ecological and geographic diversity creates a habitat that allows for a remarkably wide range of wildlife species. With over 1.8 million residents, human interactions with wildlife are common. WS works to protect property and reduce human health and safety risks at airports, schools, and along roadways. The program also protects people, pets, and livestock from wildlife-borne diseases; guards many natural resources, such as fisheries and timber, from wildlife depredation; and educates the public about wildlife and wildlife damage management. Specific projects conducted by West Virginia WS include, protecting livestock from predation; conducting sampling and monitoring for rabies; and managing damage caused by beavers, resident Canada geese, pigeons, starlings, vultures, and other wildlife.

Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this *technical assistance* can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance*, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting civil and military aviation from wildlife strikes
- Protecting livestock from coyote and vulture depredation
- Protecting public health from wildlife borne diseases
- Protecting public health, livestock, and wildlife from raccoon strain rabies
- Protecting human health associated with large flocks of roosting blackbirds in urban and suburban environments and at industrial structures

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to West Virginia:

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Managing wildlife transmission of rabies
- Reducing blackbird damage at livestock feedlots
- Managing problems caused by vultures
- Managing predators through new methods to protect livestock and wildlife



Aquaculture Assistance—West Virginia WS provides the growing aquaculture industry and state run hatcheries with techniques and methods to reduce fish-eating bird damage to the fisheries resource. Cooperators are provided with instructions on bird harassment, techniques to exclude birds from fish rearing facilities, and direct control methods when other methods fail to reduce damage.

Protecting Livestock—In addition to the many factors that cause economic losses to livestock producers, predators like the coyote cause significant losses to some farmers by attacking sheep, cattle, and goats. A West Virginia University Cooperative Extension Service survey indicated that during the 1994-1995 seasons, shepherds lost 4,630 lambs and ewes to coyote predation. On a percentage basis, sheep numbers are currently declining at a higher rate than any other time in West Virginia's agricultural history. A 1999 National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) survey of livestock producers nationwide reported that coyotes were the leading predator of sheep and lambs, accounting for 62 percent of all predator losses. The Extension Service survey also found that 51 percent of West Virginia shepherds who left the sheep business did so because of sheep losses to predators.

WS provides technical assistance to prevent livestock predation throughout West Virginia in addition to providing integrated predation management services to livestock producers in selected counties in eastern West Virginia to control coyote predation on livestock. The predation management program is run by WS through a cooperative service agreement with the West Virginia Department of Agriculture. Since the beginning of the program in 1996, WS has helped reduce livestock losses caused by predators by 90 percent and more recently the program helped reduce livestock losses to predators by 94 percent.

Protecting Humans, Livestock, and Wildlife—Rabies poses a serious threat to livestock, wildlife, pets, and public health. Raccoon rabies was virtually unknown prior to the 1950's. The disease appeared in West Virginia in 1977 and expanded throughout the east to form the most intensive rabies outbreak in the United States. More than 90

percent of reported rabies cases involve wild animals and more than 50 percent of all rabies cases reported each year in major U.S. metropolitan areas involve raccoons. Although human rabies deaths are rare, the estimated public health costs associated with rabies detection, prevention, and control have risen, exceeding \$300 million annually.

In cooperation with selected eastern States and Canada, West Virginia WS annually distributes between 1,000,000 and 1,500,000 oral rabies vaccination baits to immunize raccoons against rabies. The goal of the program is to stop the westward movement of the raccoon strain of the disease. The distribution of these baits in West Virginia will reduce the risk of raccoon rabies entering the Midwestern region of the United States, where it would increasingly threaten livestock, human populations, and other animals, and significantly raise control costs throughout the region. The continued distribution of oral rabies vaccines will not only reduce the incidence of rabies, but ultimately eliminate raccoon rabies in West Virginia, as well as in the entire eastern United States.

Protecting Human Health and Safety at Airports—WS assists West Virginia airports whenever wildlife becomes a hazard to aircraft and passenger safety. Nearly 77 percent of West Virginia land is forested and every West Virginia airport is bordered by or very near forested lands that provide wildlife habitat. Federal Aviation Administration data indicate that West Virginia has one of the highest rates involving aircraft collisions with deer.

WS is recognized internationally for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry. Wildlife Service's National Wildlife Research Center, conducts research to understand the nature of wildlife hazards at airports and develop management tools to reduce these hazards.

Applying this scientific expertise, WS provides direct assistance to West Virginia airports. This includes removing animals from areas that surround runways. WS also provides technical assistance to airports by conducting initial wildlife hazard consultations, conducting year long wildlife hazard assessments, developing wildlife hazard management plans, and training airport personnel to reduce the risk of wildlife collisions with aircraft.

Protecting Health and Safety in the Workplace—West Virginia WS provides important workplace safety with roosting bird control at industrial sites. Winter roosting birds contaminate work surfaces with droppings creating unsanitary conditions for workers, as well as, corroding equipment that could fail causing worker injury. WS uses harassment and chemicals to disperse and reduce populations of blackbirds and pigeons that create these unhealthy conditions.

Addressing Residential Property Damage Caused by Roosting Black Vultures—West Virginia WS is responding to ever increasing requests from property owners that are experiencing problems caused by roosting black vultures. Once established, these roosts can have several hundred vultures and create a health and sanitation problem caused by their droppings. The droppings can also damage and kill trees where vultures roost. Each morning, the vultures can damage

roofing materials of adjacent homes and other structures as they prepare to leave the roosting area. WS assists property owners with instructions on how to harass and disperse the vultures, and in some cases, WS will directly assist property owners in their efforts to move the vultures.

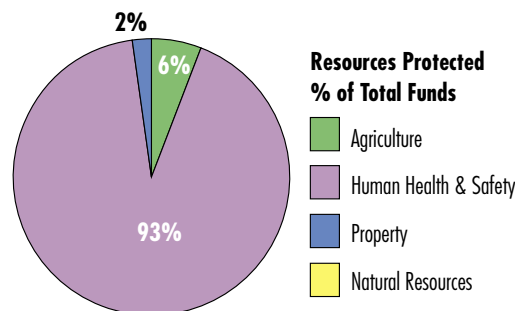
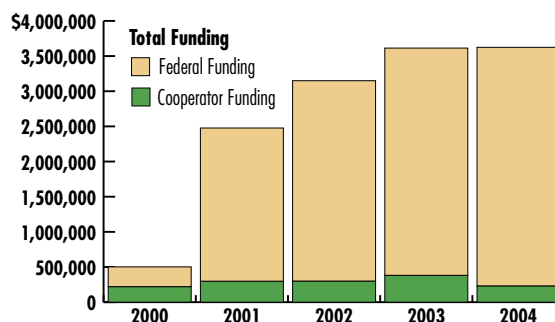
Looking to the Future

While WS resolves a diverse range of wildlife conflicts, there is an increasing demand for services in West Virginia. Wildlife diseases such as rabies are posing greater threats to humans, livestock, and pets. Lack of sport trapping due to a decline in the fur market is contributing to continued increase in the beaver population and predator problems. Finally, introduced species, such as feral hogs, are a rapidly growing wildlife management problem. While WS provides West Virginians with safe, effective, and humane assistance for dealing with wildlife conflicts, there is always a demand for more support. Limited resources require assistance to be prioritized based upon the most serious threats rather than providing a systematic and thorough evaluation of wildlife conflicts. Health and safety receive the highest priority; however, wildlife damage to property generates 49 percent of all requests for assistance. Rather than making much needed on-site evaluations of wildlife damage to property, WS is limited to making recommendations based upon telephone interviews.

WS has recently completed the development of an integrated bird control program for West Virginia. The plan, when initiated, will reduce consumption and contamination of animal feed by starlings and other birds at dairies, reduce consumption and destruction of fruit crops at orchards and vineyards, and reduce property damage and human health concerns associated with large flocks of roosting birds.

West Virginia Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and Local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.



Major Cooperators

- West Virginia Department of Agriculture
- West Virginia Department Health & Human Resources
- West Virginia Division of Natural Resources
- West Virginia University
- USDA Agricultural Research Service
- USDA Forest Service
- U. S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Department of the Navy